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AUTOPHOTO

A new exhibition explores the car's photographic appeal.

Words

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William Eggleston, Los Alamos series, 1965-1968, Eggleston Trust, Memphis © Eggleston Artistic Trust, Memphis

In his on-going collaboration with the designer, British photographer Jacob Lillis's washed out images of flowers in and around cars have become synonymous with the Simone Rocha brand, the soberly titled *Flowers and Cars* series in turn showcasing some his most recognisable work. In November, Sophie Green's *Dented Pride* – an offshoot of her visual exploration of the Stock Car and Banger racing subculture – was picked up by streetwear label Carhartt, resulting in a limited 300 piece run of vacuum packed cards and an overflowing launch event with Ditto Press.

The car, as previously determined by Jamie Hawkesworth, who shot the very first J.W. Anderson campaign against a backdrop of car carpets in 2013 (models clutched car doors), is a constant source of inspiration for the contemporary photographer but the phenomenon, unsurprisingly, is nothing new, as a new exhibition details.

Autophoto, which opens tomorrow at Fondation Cartier pour l'Art Contemporain in Paris, is the museum's second show dedicated to motor vehicles, following *Hommage à Ferrari* in 1997. Boasting a catalogue of over 500 images, *Autophoto* – derived simply from the union of 'automobile' and 'photography' – examines the relationship between the two, from the way the car has shaped the photographic landscape to the photographer's altered concept of time and space; how such immediate access to the rest of the world has produced modern imagery, and what this association might mean moving forward.

From Man Ray and Mary Ellen Mark through to Larry Clark and Martin Parr, the line-up features some of photography's biggest names from the 20th and 21st century, as well as

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many less familiar. On the eve of the show's launch, we stole a moment with associate curator, Leanne Sacramone.



(LEFT) Ronni Campana, Untitled, Badly repaired cars series, 2015, courtesy of the artist © Ronni Campana

(RIGHT) Andrew Bush, Woman Waiting to Proceed South at Sunset and Highland Boulevards, Los Angeles, at Approximately 11:59 am. One Day in February 1997, Vector Portraits series, 1997, courtesy M+B Gallery, Los Angeles
© Andrew Bush

Where did the inspiration for a photographic exhibition about cars initiate?

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Well, this is an exhibition we are doing with two outside curators – Philippe Séclier, who is editor of a magazine called AUTOhebdo and someone who is really passionate about photography, he did a documentary on Robert Frank in 2009, and Xavier Barral, who is a publisher of art books and photography books. Their point of departure for the show was the idea that photography and cars are two inventions that go back to the Industrial Revolution, and they have a similarity in that there's this idea of production in series, for photographs – and production of cars as well – and there's also a democratic idea, of being able to drive around individually and using your camera individually to take pictures, so all those ideas came together to make this show.

What interested them also was, not only how the car offered new themes and subjects for photographers, but also a new point of view and a new way of taking pictures, because many photographers actually used their cars like an extension of their camera; they'd get into their cars and they'd take pictures, so a lot of the photographs in this show are also landscape photographs. So, you have a whole bunch of themes that have to do with the car itself, the car as an object, the car industry, the usage of the car, the car as an extension of the home, also the idea of the environmental pollution by the car, all of that is dealt with in the show, but also there's a whole section of, I would say landscape photography done from the car – road trips, artists who would go on road trips and take pictures from their car.

We're also, I mean it wasn't the original intention, but in a time when we're questioning the role of the car – what are cars going to be in the future – we don't deal with that subject directly, but we're kind of looking back on the car over the 20th century through the eyes of photographers at a time where, today, we're questioning the future of what the car will be.

How easy was it to select the photographers and works featured?

It was very difficult, because we started out with a database of 6,000 photographs that we'd all researched – even more I would say – and we had to cut down the selection; ideally we should have cut it to 350 but there are 500 works in the show, so it's very dense, and you realise, it's a subject that so many photographers have dealt with. One of the basis's for selection was this idea of series, we're showing many photographic series, because of the idea of seriality and the idea of mass production of cars and also, many photographers have shown, basically an obsession or a fascination for the car and you can see that in the way they make a series around (it) and the fact that the car lends itself to making serial photographs – you're driving and what you see outside is moving, almost in a cinematic way, and photographers will shoot many pictures from their cars as it's moving.

Photographers have long been drawn to cars for aesthetic reasons. Why do you think this is?

Well, a car is interesting to use as a tool when you're a photographer, you get in you drive around and you use the windows as a frame for your pictures, you use the rearview mirrors to create reflections, they help you compose your pictures in a different way, and see the landscape in a different way, or the city in a different way. They're also fascinated with them as a symbol of freedom and modernity and speed, really they were 20th century symbols for all of those things.

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(LEFT) Seydou Keïta, Untitled 1952-55, CAAC – The Pigozzi Collection, Geneva © SKPEAC (The Seydou Keïta Photography Estate Advisor Corporation)

(RIGHT) Malick Sidibé, Taximan avec voiture, 1970, courtesy Galerie Magnin-A, Paris © Malick Sidibé

And can you think of any significant moments or developments within the photographic industry that has come about as the result of the car?

I'm not sure cars have had any impact on the photographic industry, what I do know is that, for example, Kodak used to – at the beginning of the century – they did a series of advertisements 'Kodak on the go', with a woman always with a camera in a car or next to a car (always about to leave in a car), so the two have always been connected

Were there any big surprises during the curation of the show?

Oh gosh, that's a difficult question. The biggest surprise is the sheer quantity of photographers who have dealt with the subject, and I guess another big surprise is how many photographers have used the same motifs and similar motifs such as the perspective of the road going off into the distance, or using the car side windows as a frame to frame the landscape or the rearview mirror; those motifs come back over and over again.

And did you have a specific audience in mind when you were putting the show together?

Well, we'd like to have a large audience – we're directing this show to basically everyone who's interested in photography and cars.

Makes sense. So what do you hope visitors will take away from the exhibition?

I just hope people have a really great experience seeing beautiful photographs from the 20th century up until the present; to enjoy seeing these photographs come together – I mean there's so many of them and they're very beautiful, and I just hope people enjoy taking their time to look at them, and discovering them.

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And finally, do you have a favourite piece?

Oh I never like to talk about favourite pictures when I'm talking to journalists haha, I always end up insulting one artist or hurting someone's feelings.



Juergen Teller, OJ Simpson n°5, 2000, courtesy of the artist © Juergen Teller

Autophoto runs from 20th April to 24th September at the Fondation Cartier pour l'Art Contemporain; learn more [here](#).

<https://www.wonderlandmagazine.com/2017/04/19/autophoto/>